

# Big Hill Pond State Park Strategic Management Plan

---

**2023 – 2033**

DRAFT

## Table of Contents

<b>Park Purpose, History and Description .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Goals, Objectives and Action Plans .....</b>	<b>3</b>
THE RESOURCES: Exemplary Natural and Cultural Stewardship .....	3
THE VISITOR: Welcoming and Inviting to All .....	4
THE AMENITIES: Well-Maintained Facilities and Amenities.....	5
THE OPERATIONS: Operational Excellence.....	5
<b>Park Overview .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Site Fact Sheet .....	6
Key Attractions .....	6
<b>Site and Operations Assessment .....</b>	<b>7</b>
Site and Facility Assessment.....	7
Operational Assessment.....	9
Summary of Key Recommendations .....	13
<b>Resource Management Plan .....</b>	<b>15</b>
Resource Management Objectives .....	16
Resource Inventory and Assessment .....	16
Management Strategies .....	18
Land Management Strategies .....	19
<b>Interpretive Programming and Education Plan .....</b>	<b>20</b>
Interpretation, Programming and Education Goals .....	20
Strategic Programs and Services .....	21
<b>Financial Pro Forma .....</b>	<b>23</b>

## Park Purpose, History and Description

Big Hill Pond State Park exists as a recreation and education area in West Tennessee. The area now known as Big Hill Pond got its start in the early 1850s, when the Charleston/Memphis Railroad cut its way through the Tuscumbia River Bottoms resulting in the 35-acre borrow pit. The large depression filled with water. Due to the remoteness of this wilderness, it became a stopover for migrating waterfowl and home to a variety of wildlife. Some of the old duck hunters in the early part of the 1900's talked of thousands of mallards and wood ducks that wintered there and the hunting was fantastic. Some of the old hunters were Eber Greer, W.T. Greer, Roscoe Baldwin, Spurgen Browder, Dr. Jim Smith, and Merle (Slick) Lohma, just to name a few. Big Hill Pond was also a great place to fish, with large creels of bream, bass and crappie taken on a regular basis.

The idea to develop Big Hill Pond occurred when John Howell confided in Joe Hamm about a group of doctors and lawyers that were interested in buying his land for use as a private hunting and fishing club. Howell felt he and his wife needed better access to the highway, so they were able to get to the doctor and grocery store when the backwater got out. In those times, the only way to reach anyone was by boat. Mr. Howell said he had fought the beavers for ten years, but they had won the fight! The dam had flooded roughly three hundred and fifty acres of his farm. Howell named his farm "Beaver Lake" and started charging \$0.50 for hunting and fishing. However, there was one thing that concerned Howell, if his land sold to a private group, his friends and neighbors couldn't continue to hunt and fish the property. This turn of events leads to Hamm asking Howell if he would be interested in selling this property to the state for a wildlife refuge or a wildlife management area, so that the public could still enjoy the property. Howell liked the idea and agreed to hold the land until the state could secure the appropriations to buy the property. Hamm discussed this proposition with Leon Jones, the McNairy County Agent. With Jones help maps of the entire area were created and a plan formed to acquire property in the sum of 30,000 acres across the area. They also met with Bill Roberts, Manager of Pickwick Electric Cooperative and Chairman of the McNairy County Development Committee, who agreed with the idea. The group of men that got the ball rolling in the 1960's thought that the name Big Hill Pond Wildlife Management Area was a good fit, and over time it became Big Hill Pond State Park.

Big Hill Pond also saw its share of the Civil War action from the African American Troops guarding a small fort and the railroad tracks trusses, to the Davis Bridge Battle Site, which was the second largest battle in West Tennessee. After the Civil War, the land sat quietly being used for hunting, farmland, and a place for whiskey production.

## Goals, Objectives and Action Plans

### THE RESOURCES: Exemplary Natural and Cultural Stewardship

**Goal: Tennessee State Parks will be nationally recognized for exemplary stewardship of natural and cultural resources.**

**Objective - *More and better stewards:*** Increase internal and external stewards who share Tennessee State Parks core values and can contribute to the State Parks mission to preserve, protect, and share Tennessee's natural and cultural resources.

Action Plan: Encourage park staff to follow Go Green Guidelines, continue working with volunteers to maintain the trails, and provide educational opportunities for visitors-focusing on resource management.

**Objective - *Better resource management practices:*** Identify, manage, and restore unique natural and cultural resources for generations to come.

Action Plan: Continue to promote native grasslands in areas around the park that promote pollinators while reducing erosion, follow lake management plan for Travis McNatt lake to improve the fishery, and identify and preserve cultural areas on the park, such as the Civil War Earthworks.

**Objective: *Better data and technology:*** Leverage data and technology to help inform and guide decisions on natural and cultural resources stewardship.

Action Plan: Utilize Park and department databases to identify resource management projects and set SMART goals to achieve necessary outcomes to preserve the natural and cultural resources at Big Hill Pond.

## THE VISITOR: Welcoming and Inviting to All

**Goal:** Tennessee State Parks will be the most accessible, welcoming, and inviting system of parks that enriches Tennesseans and visitors through excellent interpretation, education, and resource-based recreation.

**Objective: *accessible, welcoming, and inviting to all:*** create quality and varied programs of interpretation, recreation, and outreach so that all audiences feel welcome and invited.

Action Plan: Create quality educational programs that tell the full story of Big Hill Pond and the surrounding area, promote recreational programs through public outreach targeting the local community.

**Objective: *high quality programming:*** develop and support mission-based and resource-relevant programs to engage visitors, empower staff, and develop community wellbeing.

Action Plan: Continue working with McNairy County schools by providing high quality programs that assist teachers with meeting state curriculum standards. Partner with Memphis Museum of Science & History and McNairy County schools to provide high quality programs that assist teachers with meeting state curriculum standards in the classroom or provide opportunities for outside educational learning. Use Park ambassadors such as the Barn Owl to assist classrooms with understanding of how soundwaves are used in their everyday lives to survive.

**Objective: *resource-based outdoor recreation:*** provide resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities that ensure representation of Tennessee's natural, scenic, and cultural resources.

Action Plan: Continue working with volunteers to keep hiking trails open while also making improvements to help reduce erosion and further damage to ecosystems.

## THE AMENITIES: Well-Maintained Facilities and Amenities

**Goal:** Tennessee State Parks will be well maintained with facilities and amenities that delight visitors and make Tennesseans proud.

**Objective:** *Improve maintenance:* Improve overall maintenance and upkeep of all park facilities and amenities that contribute to meaningful visitor experiences.

Action Plan: Use employee action plans as well as HIPPO software to hold park staff accountable while accomplishing short- and long-term goals set by the park and the department.

**Objective:** *Better park accessibility:* ensure all visitors have opportunities for meaningful experiences in every Tennessee State Park.

Action Plan: Ensure that all projects are completed on time and that ADA standards are being met when possible. Make improvements to all parking areas to include at least one van accessible parking space at each facility. Make improvements in the campground including ADA campsites and restroom facilities. When installing new features such as playgrounds ADA features and access is desired. These goals will help assist people with needs to enjoy many of the features of Big Hill Pond that have not been accessible in the past.

**Objective:** *Quality and welcoming facilities and amenities:* provide high-quality and well-planned facilities and amenities that enrich the visitor experience.

Action Plan: All public facilities will be kept safe, clean, and inviting while continuing to make improvements that help meet ADA goals. Make improvements that support Big Hill Pond's theme and improve the park's aesthetics to create a great experience for the visitors.

## THE OPERATIONS: Operational Excellence

**Goal:** Tennessee State Parks will be a national model for operational excellence in a state park system.

**Objective:** *Support and empower our people:* support and empower our workforce by creating a caring environment that encourages professional growth and great customer service.

Action Plan: Provide and promote a safe work environment, while providing training and professional development opportunities that support the park and departments goals while advancing the employees knowledge.

**Objective:** *Efficient and effective operations:* provide efficient, effective, and fiscally responsible service to Tennesseans and our visitors.

Action Plan: Create more opportunities for volunteer projects, increase the native habitat while reducing maintenance needs, and explore partnerships that help promote the park with the goal of finding partnerships that support the park to reduce park expense.

## Park Overview

### Site Fact Sheet

Park Name	Big Hill Pond State Park
Site Manager	Justin King
Area Manager	Zach Tinkle
Park acreage	4,185
Total number of visitors (FY 2022)	73,057
Total expenses before CO (FY 2022)	\$445,072
Total revenues (FY 2022)	\$59,279
Retail cost recovery% <sup>1</sup>	143%
Park cost recovery%	13.3%
Average expense per visitor (FY 2022)	\$6.09
Average revenue per visitor (FY 2022)	\$0.81
Gross profit or loss	(\$385,793)
Total full-time available positions / filled	5/5
Total part-time available positions / filled	2/1
Primary feeder markets	Fayette County, Shelby County, North Mississippi, McNairy County, Hardeman County, Madison County
Primary reasons people visit	Hiking, Camping, Fishing, Recreation, Paddling, Hunting, Horseback Riding
Opportunities for improvement	Expand Camping to RV sites, Wrangler Sites, Lake Management

### Key Attractions

The amenities or features listed below are those that seem to be most popular for visitors.

- Dismal Swamp Boardwalk
- Observation Tower
- Travis McNatt Lake & Big Hill Pond
- Davis Bridge Battlefield
- 30 miles of Hiking Trails; 6 miles of shared horseback and mountain bike trail
- Aviary
- 18 Hole Disc Golf Course
- 28 site Primitive Campground

<sup>1</sup> Based on T.C.A. 11-3-305, Self-sufficiency of revenue-generating facilities

## Site and Operations Assessment

This site and operations assessment is a culmination of analyses and findings from a review of the condition of facilities, infrastructure, and operations at Big Hill Pond State Park. The findings and observations are not intended to be an exhaustive review of all issues present but provide a basic understanding of the predominant issues that contribute to the site's current operating conditions. The assessment includes the following:

1. Site and Facilities Assessment
2. Operational Assessment
3. Financial Assessment

## Site and Facility Assessment

### Methodology

Facility and asset conditions are rated using a differential scale of excellent, good, fair, or poor. Descriptions of conditions that are attributed to each of these findings are also provided.

Scale of Conditions	
Rating	General Description
Excellent	Facilities/amenities are in 'excellent' condition when they show little or no maintenance or repair problems. Facilities do not feature any major design or operational issues or flaws that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities are easy to clean and maintain in order to place them back into public use and the users perceive them to be in excellent shape.
Good	Facilities/amenities are in 'good' condition when they show only minor maintenance or repair problems. Most maintenance issues with these facilities typically appear to be the result of age and/or heavy use. Facilities may only feature minor design or operational issues that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities are moderately easy to clean and maintain in order to place them back into service and the users perceive them to be adequate for their use, but probably not in excellent shape.
Fair	Facilities/amenities are in 'fair' condition when they show significant maintenance or repair problems. Facilities generally exhibit ongoing maintenance issues that appear to be the result of age, heavy use, or design or operational flaws. Some maintenance and repair needs may compound their fair condition by being deferred because of budget and/or resource limitations. Facilities require more effort to clean and maintain before placing them back into service and the users may perceive them as being less than adequate for their use and in a state of deterioration. The facility or structure may need of major repair or replacement.
Poor	Facilities/amenities are in 'poor' condition when they show significant, on-going maintenance or repair problems that ultimately may result in suspended use for repair/replacement. Maintenance and repair issues are possibly the result of poor maintenance and clearly the result of age, heavy use, or design or operational flaws. Problems with the facilities are often compounded over time due to consistently deferred maintenance and repair because of budget and/or resource limitations. Facilities may feature major design or operational issues that contribute to diminished use or increased maintenance or upkeep. Facilities require excessive effort to clean and maintain before placing them back into service and the users often perceive them as being inadequate for their use and in a state of serious deterioration. The facility or structure may need of major repair or replacement.

## Facility Inventory and Assessment

The table below is an inventory of facilities and amenities at Big Hill Pond State Park, and provides the assessed condition of each as reviewed in April 2023.

Site Asset / Amenity	Quantity	Condition
Snack Bars	3	Excellent
Visitor Center/Maintenance	1	Good
Pocahontas School House	1	Poor
Manager Residence	1	Good
Ranger Residence	1	Poor
Basketball Court	1	Good
Pickleball Court	1	Good
Boat House	1	Excellent
Kayak Storage	1	Good
Travis McNatt Lake Bridge	1	Fair
Travis McNatt Lake Boat Ramp	1	Poor
Big Hill Pond Boat Ramp	1	Fair
Dismal Swamp boardwalk	1	Poor
Campground Bath House	1	Fair
Picnic Area Rest Rooms	1	Good
Campground (28 sites)	1	Good
1800s Chimney	1	Good
Disc Golf 18 hole	1	Good
Aviary	1	Good
Picnic Shelter	1	Good
Picnic Shelter at Chimney	1	Poor

## Trail Inventory and Assessment

Big Hill Pond has a total of 9 hiking trails spanning over 30 miles within the park. These trails are natural surface trails that have a lot of elevation change making them moderate to difficult for most hikers. The trails take in a vast array of scenery of the park from rolling hills covered in hard wood timber to low lying cypress wetlands only crossable by an elevated bridge. There are four opportunities for overnight camping on the trails at a back country trail shelter. Big Hill Pond also has one horse trail that is an easy day ride consisting of 6 miles.

Some challenges that the park's trails face is constant erosion due to the poor soil quality found at the park, McNairy loam. Some trails are also experiencing continued flooding from heavy rains and beaver populations expanding. Storm damage is a challenge for the parks trails as many trails have numerous trees fall during the spring and fall seasons.



## New Assets Needed

List new assets and amenities that would fall under capital expenditures that are needed to improve visitor experience and operational efficiency.

New Asset & Amenities	Description
Wrangler Campground	10 to 15 site full hook up wrangler camp
Cabins on the Travis	5 to 8 cabins on the Travis McNatt Lake
Visitor/Education Center	Visitor Center with public restroom, giftshop, conference room, and educational area
Additional RV campsites	Expand the campground
Public Restrooms at the Chimney	With the addition of the new play area and the picnic shelter at the Chimney there is a need for public restrooms in this area.

## Prioritized Facility Needs

Based on the facility inventory and assessment, these prioritized needs have been identified.

Facility Need	Priority Assignment
Visitor Center development	1
Restrooms at the Chimney and Play area.	2
Wrangler Camp development	3
Additional RV Campsites	4
Cabins at the Travis McNatt Lake	5

## Operational Assessment

The Operational Assessment includes:

1. An inventory and classification of programs and services being provided at the site,
2. A review of staffing at the site,
3. A review of concessionaires and partners operating at the site,
4. Visitation and customer satisfaction, and
5. Professional development and training.

## Inventory and Classification of Programs and Services

Programs and services are classified into one of three major categories:

- 1) Core or Essential Services;
- 2) Important Services; and
- 3) Value added or Visitor Supported Services.

Functions of the site are classified into these categories based in part on the mission and public mandates for both the site and the agency. For the programs and services in each of these categories, there are financial performance expectations that will define how services are funded and evaluated.

### CATEGORY 1 – CORE SERVICES *[Largely supported by public subsidies]*

Core programs, services and facilities are those the agency must provide and/or are essential in order to capably govern and meet statutory requirements. The failure of the agency to provide Category 1 services at adequate levels could result in significant negative consequences for the public and the resources under protection. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as core or essential are:

- The services are mandated by the agency's law or charter or are contractually obligated by agreement to provide the services.
- The services are essential to protecting and supporting the public's health and safety.
- The services protect and maintain valuable assets and infrastructure.
- The services would generally and reasonably be expected and supported by residents, businesses, customers, and partners.
- The services are those that cannot or should not be provided by the private sector.
- The services provide a sound investment of public funds.

The following programs and services offered at Big Hill Pond State Park have been identified as **core services**:

- Support the mission of Tennessee State Parks which is "To preserve, protect, and share Tennessee's natural and cultural resources while providing safe, quality outdoor experiences."
- Provide for public access to the park, the facilities, and the grounds.
- Provide for public safety for visitors and protection of natural and cultural resources.
- Provide for maintenance of grounds, facilities, and infrastructure.
- Maintain facilities developed through the LWCF program to required standards.
- Provide for basic, non-staff supported day-use activities (such as hiking and picnicking) with trails, informational signage, picnic tables, trash cans and restroom facilities.
- Maintain Park drinking water and wastewater programs to state standards.

### **CATEGORY 2 – IMPORTANT SERVICES** *[Supported by a balance of revenues and public subsidy]*

Important programs, services and facilities are those the agency should provide, and are important to governing and effectively serving residents, businesses, customers, and partners. Providing Category 2 services expands or enhances the agency's ability to provide and sustain its core services. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as important are:

- The services expand, enhance or support identified core services.
- These services are broadly supported and utilized by the community, and are considered an appropriate, important, and valuable public good. Public support may be conditional upon how the services are paid for or funded.
- The services generate income or revenue that offsets some or all the operating cost and/or are deemed to provide economic, social or environmental outcomes or results.

The following programs and services offered at Big Hill Pond have been identified as **important services**:

- Provide a full range of environmental, cultural, and recreational programs.
- Offer park-specific information at the Visitor Center and Nature Center.
- Provide educational programs for schools and organized groups.
- Provide public access to Shelters, Playgrounds, Aviary, Boat Launches, and Public Restrooms.

### **CATEGORY 3 – VISITOR SUPPORTED SERVICES** *[Almost exclusively supported by earned revenue]*

Visitor supported programs, services and facilities are those discretionary services that the agency may provide when additional funding or revenue exists to offset the cost of providing those services. Category

3 services provide added value above and beyond what is required or expected. The criteria for programs or services to be classified as visitor supported are:

- The services expand, enhance or support Core Services, Important Services, and the quality of life of the visitors, community, or stakeholders.
- The services are supported, valued, and well utilized and provide an appropriate and valuable public benefit.
- The services generate income or funding from sponsorships, grants, user fees or other sources that offset some or all of their cost and/or provide a meaningful return on investment.
- The Services can possibly be provided through outsourcing or use of concessionaires, providing opportunities for community enterprise or services that may not otherwise be provided by the agency.

The following programs and services offered at Big Hill Pond have been identified as **visitor supported services**:

- Provide support services for 28 tent/RV campsites.
- Provide support services for picnic shelters.
- Operate a boat rental operation on the Travis McNatt Lake, including a snack bar and gift shop.
- Operate the camp store within the campground
- Provide support for gift shop in the park office
- Provide mobile gift shop options for organized events at the park, as needed or requested

## Personnel / Staffing Review

Personnel and staffing at Big Hill Pond State Park represent the largest area of budgetary expense at an average of 60% of the total operating budget each year for the last three complete years, which is below than the target of labor costs not exceeding 65% of total operating expenditures. The tables below and on the following page provide a basic review of the current staffing at the site.

### Full Time Equivalent Employees

Position / Title	Quantity (FTE)	Compensation Total
Park Manager	1	*
Park Ranger	1	*
Administrative Assistant 1	1	\$42,924
Conservation Worker 2	1	\$34,236
Conservation Worker 1	1	\$30,504
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>\$236,172</b>

*\*Law enforcement compensation confidential by TN law.*

### Part Time Employees

Position / Title	Quantity	Compensation Total
Job Share Clerk 2	1	\$10,944
Job Share Con. Worker 2	1	\$33,900
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>\$44,844</b>

### Labor Support

Labor Support	Annual Hours
Volunteers	1500
Community Service Workers	15
Engineering and Construction Crews	
Resource Management Crews	
Other: _____	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1515</b>

### Total Labor Compensation Expense

Labor Type	Labor Expense
Full Time Equivalent Employees	\$236,172
Part Time Employees	\$44,844
<b>TOTAL Annual Labor Expense</b>	<b>\$281,016</b>

### Additional Future Positions Needed

Position / Title	Quantity	FTE or PT	Year Needed	Justification
Park Ranger	1	FTE	2023	Meet staffing needs for covering all shifts
Clerk	1	FTE		Additional staffing to support a future Visitor Center
Campground attendant	1	PT	2025	Needed to operate the camp store and camper check-in
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3</b>			

## Financial Performance

Revenue per available unit for the last four years in overnight facilities is detailed in the table below.

### Current RevPAR

Fiscal Year	Campground Rev Per Unit
2019	\$.84
2020	\$1.41
2021	\$2.03
2022	\$1.70

**Projected RevPAR** - Based on current RevPAR trends at the park and any known developments over the next four years. Revenues will be down in FY 24 and FY25 due to the campground being closed for much need upgrades.

Fiscal Year	Campground Rev Per Unit
2023	\$1.80
2024	\$.50
2025	\$.50
2026	\$2.50

### Customer Service

Platform / Site	Year	Customer Satisfaction Level
Google Review	2023	4.6
All Trails	2023	4.3
Facebook	2023	4.9

### Professional Development and Training

The following professional development and training opportunities are being explored and planned for the staff and volunteers at this park:

- MOSH partnership through Pink Palace with the local school system to help meet educational goals/curriculum standards within the school system.
- Per the upcoming Animal Ambassador policy with the state, staff has been sent to training and park staff is working toward the required 2<sup>nd</sup> permit holder for Class II Raptors with an additional rehabilitation permit.
- Routine management training.
- Routine law enforcement training.
- Maintenance staff have requested electric and plumbing certifications.

### Summary of Key Recommendations

Please provide short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations for addressing operational issues at the park and improving overall park performance.

### Short Term Recommendations (Less than 1 year)

#### 1. Site and Facilities

- Replace picnic shelter at the 1800's Chimney to accommodate groups, weddings, and events which will help increase park revenue.
- Follow recommendations made by TWRA to improve the Travis McNatt Lake that align with the Bill Dance Signature Lake plans.
- Renovate Picnic Area restrooms making them more modern, welcoming, inviting, and accessible by following ADA guidelines.
- Improve ADA parking at the picnic area to compliment the shelter and the restroom.
- Pave public parking areas at the new play area and chimney.

#### 2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Hire additional Ranger to meet staffing needs. Currently, the park has one Manager and one Ranger to cover all shifts. This presents a challenge covering a day shift and an evening shift. With more visitors and more campers there needs to be at a minimum Thursday through Sunday a morning and evening shift.
- b. An additional Park Ranger will also allow for improvements in programming, resource management, and park law enforcement/medical responses as duties can be divided evenly allowing each Ranger to focus on specific areas.

### **3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience**

- a. Open the new play area including 18-hole PDA disc golf course, pickle ball court, basketball court, and new playground.
- b. Improve informational kiosk signage around the park to help Big Hill Pond tell its full story and provide visitors with simple directions around the park.

## **Mid Term Recommendations (2-5 years)**

### **1. Site and Facilities**

- a. Campground upgrade completed with new dump station, water and electric on each site, bathroom remodel, camp store relocated new playground, and picnic shelter.
- b. Dismal Swamp Boardwalk project completed.
- c. Big Hill Pond boat launch access with kayak launch dock completed and funded through the RTP grant.
- d. Add restrooms at the 1800's chimney picnic shelter to support visitors needs at the recreation area.
- e. Widen and pave the entire park road system as larger campers will be using the extremely narrow roads after the campground renovation is complete.
- f. Expand and improve public fishing areas at the Travis McNatt Lake.

### **2. Operations and Staffing**

- a. Completely staff all operations, including the camp store and boat house, expanding the hours at both locations to improve customer's experience after the campground project is complete.
- b. Explore the opportunity of having a camp host to help with customer's needs in the campground.

### **3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience**

- a. Local Community outreach to promote the new amenities opened at Big Hill Pond.
- b. Develop a management plan that will keep all the new amenities in good working order insuring that regular and preventive maintenance is being performed to reduce unnecessary cost associated with neglect.
- c. Complete the ADA story book trail that is funded through the Project Diabetes Grant.

## Long Term Recommendations (5+ years)

### 1. Site and Facilities

- a. New Visitor Center located in a central location of the park housing a giftshop, interpretive area, conference room, office space, and aviary.
- b. Expansion of RV sites in the campground.
- c. Additional campground with hook ups to support the wranglers who visit the park.
- d. Erect five to eight small cabins on the Travis McNatt Lake.

### 2. Operations and Staffing

- a. Additional support staff for the visitor center would be needed to keep the visitor center open seven days a week.
- b. With the expansion of the existing campground, RV campground, wrangler campground, and cabins an additional Ranger position could be justified.

### 3. Customer Service / Visitor Experience

- a. Improve at least one trail to meet ADA compliance.
- b. With the new visitor's center being open seven days a week, we could offer more in person interpretative programming during extended hours of operations to offer guests a more immersive visit to the park.

## Resource Management Plan

A resource management plan is a specific statement of the objectives you have for your land and natural resources, as well as any significant cultural and historic resources stewarded by the state park. This includes a defined series of priorities and activities that will take place in order to meet those objectives. This can include future potential land acquisitions or divestitures that are necessary to meet the park's resource management goals and objectives.

Big Hill Pond's unique landscape is a great example of the diversity held within the state of Tennessee. At Big Hill Pond, one can view the 1850's Cypress Pond created by the Memphis to Charleston Railroad as a borrow pit that is now said to be the largest pond within the state of Tennessee. Less than half a mile away, you can ascend some of the highest peaks in McNairy County. The park's trails twist and turn through huge sandstone rock outcroppings. This diversity of the landscape provides numerous habitats that are the homes to many wildlife and plant species, such as the endangered Tuscumbia Darter and the Big Eared Bat. Big Hill Pond also holds the state record Sparkleberry Tree with a circumference of 39 inches and height of 29 feet.

The area now known as Big Hill Pond played a huge roll in the historic and cultural story of the park and surrounding McNairy County. Before Westward Expansion, the Chickasaw and Cherokee Indians called this land home. The area held great importance during the 1850's when the railroad passed through the Hatchie River, Tuscumbia River, and Cypress Creek bottoms. The railway through the park played a key role during the Civil War as it was a main line for the transportation of troops and supplies. After the war, the area was settled quietly with row crop and sharecrop farmers.

The contents of this resource management plan are as follows:

1. Resource Management Objectives
2. Resource Inventory and Assessment



3. Management Strategies
4. Priority Actions
5. Supplemental Information

## Resource Management Objectives

**Goal:** Tennessee State Parks will be nationally recognized for exemplary stewardship of natural and cultural resources.

**Objective - *More and better stewards:*** Increase internal and external stewards who share Tennessee State Parks core values and can contribute to the State Parks mission to steward Tennessee's natural and cultural resources.

**Objective - *Better resource management practices:*** Identify, manage, and restore unique natural and cultural resources for generations to come.

**Objective: *Better data and technology:*** Leverage data and technology to help inform and guide decisions on natural and cultural resources stewardship.

Aligned with these objectives are specific strategies to achieve the desired outcomes for the natural, cultural, and historic resources of this park.

### Strategies

- A. Identify and document endangered and protected species within the park boundary, developing a management plan to keep records of any threats or positive improvements to the population.
- B. Research the impact of the Civil War to Big Hill Pond and tell the full story of how the troops here guarded important railway trusses.
- C. Use the park raptor program to educate visitors about conservation, rehabilitation, and the importance of raptors within the ecosystem
- D. Use state park software to record and manage park trails and their impact.

## Resource Inventory and Assessment

The significant natural, cultural and historic resources of the park requiring management are detailed below including a condition assessment rating for each. Condition assessments are selected from the following options based on what most describes the current condition of the resource:

1. **Excellent** – resource is in excellent condition; all potential threats to the integrity of the resource are currently managed and effectively mitigated.
2. **Good** – resource is generally in good condition and stable; threats to the integrity of the resource require regular management in order to mitigate.
3. **Fair** – resource is in stable condition but difficult to mitigate ongoing threats; additional management support is required.
4. **Poor** – resource is generally in poor condition with management support required to both improve existing conditions and address threats.



5. **Critical** – resource is highly threatened or deteriorated and requires immediate management prioritization.

Significant Park Resources	Quantity	Current Conditions	Notes
Dismal Swamp	300 acres	Good	Continuing to increase in size due to beaver population and drainage issues
Travis McNatt Lake	165 acres	Fair	The fishing is poor due to a lack of forage and water conditions. The North end of the lake is growing due to beaver population; however it is creating a great wet lands habitat. The boat ramp and parking areas need improvement.
Big Hill Pond	35 acres	Good	Fishing is fair at the Big Hill Pond. This is a great cypress lake viewing area. Great for birding and recreational kayaking.
Upland Hardwood Forest	3,000 acres	Good	The forest is healthy.
Tuscumbia River	3.5 mile	Fair	The Tuscumbia River is silting in at a fast rate. No boat traffic in the summer months. Winter months provides access for hunting.
Cypress Creek	1 mile	Fair	The Cypress Creek is silting in at a fast rate. No boat traffic in the summer months. Winter months provides access for hunting.
Hatchie River	.5 acre	Good	Boat ramp access and parking area. Gravel Parking area with a concrete ramp.
Davis Bridge Battlefield	1000 acres	Fair	In the process of turning this over to Shiloh National Military Park. There is approximately 200 acres of fields that have numerous invasive plants. There is flooding concerns due to beaver population. There is approximately 600 acres of plantation pines where the East side of the battle fields were at.
Low lying hardwood forest	1,200 acres	Fair	Currently losing trees in these areas due to increased flooding, storm damage, and beaver population.
John Howell Slough	1 mile	Excellent	Very healthy oxbow located in the park hunting area.
Pollinator Habitat	3 acres	Good	The pollinator fields have been sowed to help reduce erosion and mowing while providing habitat for nature.

Civil War Earth Works	1	Good	Earth Works overlooking the Charleston to Memphis Railway.
-----------------------	---	------	------------------------------------------------------------

## Management Strategies

The management strategies outlined below are directly correlated to the resources identified previously in the *Resource Inventory and Assessment* section immediately above. These are general and overall management recommendations for each resource from which priority actions will be determined. Each resource has both a “Public Use” management strategy (which could include limited or no public access, or managed access with infrastructure and regulation) and a “General Management” strategy.

The priority assignments reflect the highest resource management priorities of the park over the next 1-5 years (High Priority) and 6-10 years (Moderate Priority)

Resource	Management Recommendations	Priority
Big Hill Pond	<p><b>Public Use:</b> Develop a management plan with TWRA resources to help improve the fishery while also preserving the natural habitat in this area. Promote canoe and kayak only in this area to reduce the number of larger boats in this area.</p> <p><b>General Management:</b> Identify species in this area, promote a healthy habitat through a well-developed management plan that supports TWRA initiatives.</p>	Moderate
Upland Hardwood Forest.	<p><b>Public Use:</b> Continue to manage and upkeep the access trails through these areas.</p> <p><b>General Management:</b> Identify all hazardous trees in these areas removing the ones that pose a threat to the public or structures.</p>	Moderate
Travis McNatt Lake	<p><b>Public Use:</b> Public bank fishing access and boat ramp access.</p> <p><b>General Management:</b> Continue working with TWRA and their management plan for Travis McNatt lake to meet the goals established for the Bill Dance Fishing Trail Lake project.</p>	High
Dismal Swamp	<p><b>Public Use:</b> Access is limited to the Dismal Swamp Boardwalk which is a half mile elevated boardwalk in this area.</p> <p><b>General Management:</b> Continue to identify trees that area hazardous to the public and the boardwalk structure removing these as needed. Manage the water level in this area with beaver control removing beaver dams to reduce the water level in this area. Continue working with USDA and the feral hog control plan to reduce erosion and wetland habitat destruction.</p>	High

Tuscumbia River	<b>Public Use:</b> Public Boat ramp access. <b>General Management:</b> Continue to work with TWRA managing this resource that passes through the park.	Moderate
Hatchie River	<b>Public Use:</b> Public Boat ramp access <b>General Management:</b> Continue working with TWRA to manage this access point and make improvements when needed.	Moderate
John Howell Slough	<b>Public Use:</b> Hiking Trail access only. <b>General Management:</b> Continue working with TWRA to manage this area within the public hunting area in the park. Educate park visitors about this area and why it is a public hunting area.	High
Davis Bridge	<b>Public Use:</b> Access is limited to two parking areas, one overlook, and one roadbed that allows walking access to the Hatchie River. <b>General Management:</b> Continue resource management with the battlefields until NPS takes over ownership of the property and then develop a partnership that benefits both NPS and State Parks.	High

## Land Management Strategies

In some cases, strategic land acquisitions or divestitures are necessary to meet the overall resource management goals and objectives of the park. This can include opportunities to address buffers, watersheds, viewsheds, inholdings, and adjacent properties. The table below details **general strategies** for land management. Timelines refer to Short Term (1-3 years), Mid Term (4-6 years), and Long Term (7-10 years).

Land Management Strategy	Timeline
Dispose of Davis Bridge Battlefield to Shiloh National Military Park	Short Term
Dispose of Pocahontas School House	Short Term

## Interpretive Programming and Education Plan

The Interpretation, Programming, and Education planning is currently going through a planning process to further build out the process. This section only represents the very basic framework. As TSP moves forward with the future of Interpretive programming and education this section will likely be changed to accommodate those modifications.

Attached to this plan are the Interpretive Program Templates in fillable PDF forms.

Big Hill Pond's interpretative themes focus on the preservation and conservation of the various plant and animal life that inhabit the ecosystems of Big Hill Pond's natural forests and wetland areas. Park staff have worked toward this mission by partnering with the Tennessee Honey Project. Currently there are 2 active and producing honeybee colonies. Another area of focus has been the preservation of the pollinator habitat through the park itself and partnerships with Tennessee Department of Transportation. The Travis McNatt Lake levee is an active pollinator habitat that is thriving. This fall, the park utilized the Iris Fund Grant to hydroseed the park roadsides to ensure the well-being of the park honeybees as well as other native pollinators in and around the park. The park also boasts a 4-stall aviary that is home to 5 native birds of prey that are animal ambassadors for the park used in programming. This programming strives to inspire visitors of current and future generations to take with them a sense of care for our local and natural resources such as the plants, wetlands, and animal life they have learned about and drive them towards making small changes to their everyday life to be a better steward to our local environment.

### Interpretation, Programming and Education Goals

**Goal:** Tennessee State Parks will be the most accessible, welcoming, and inviting system of parks that enriches Tennesseans and visitors through excellent interpretation, education, and resource-based recreation.

**Objective:** *accessible, welcoming, and inviting to all:* create quality and varied programs of interpretation, recreation, and outreach so that all audiences feel welcome and invited.

**Objective:** *high quality programming:* develop and support mission-based and resource-relevant programs to engage visitors, empower staff, and develop community wellbeing.

**Objective:** *resource-based outdoor recreation:* provide resource-based outdoor recreation opportunities that ensure representation of Tennessee's natural, scenic, and cultural resources.

Within these objectives are the following desired outcomes:

- Building stewards
- Ensuring Equity
- Provide the Highest Value
- Develop Resource Based Programming
- Support Staff

## Strategic Programs and Services

The strategies detailed below with corresponding action plans are aligned with the Comprehensive Strategic Plan of Tennessee State Parks.

**Strategy – Telling Full Stories:** to identify and replicate best practices while establishing new methods for representing diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just dialogues.

**Action Plan:** Continue to tell the stories of the park and how it came to be a wetlands area and the ecosystems that were created as a byproduct of human development to the area. Park staff will need to do research and reach out to local historians to be able to tell the stories of the workers who came to what came to be known as Big Hill Pond to construct the railway, the families who came to the area after the building of the railway, and the ecosystems that developed here as an unintended but welcome result to make the park what it is today.

**Strategy – Interpretative Media:** Connecting people to the resources of Tennessee State Parks with technology in ways that compliment and expand interpretation within and beyond the park, giving everyone access to becoming a park steward.

**Action Plan:** Continue working with Memphis Museum of Science & History, U.T. Selmer, and Coon Creek to identify schools need for programs thus helping teachers meet their educational goals in the classroom.

**Strategy – Develop and maintain a portfolio of programs across multiple types of experiences:**

- A. Interpretation of natural, historic, and cultural resources
- B. 3-5 unique experiences for all audiences
- C. Varying intensity from self-guided to immersive experiences
- D. Partnership opportunities for program delivery
- E. Varying costs to the user from “free to fee” based on value of the benefit to the participant.

**Action Plan:** Big Hill Pond is building a strong partnership with the McNairy County school system, as well as other nearby schools, with programs that mainly focus on Birds of Prey, Pelts and Skulls of Native Animals, Creek Crawls, and ranger led hikes that all are tied back to state requirements for educational goals. Each year the number of field trips is climbing exponentially as well as requested visits to the schools for programming.

**Strategy – Develop and maintain diverse and varied resourced-based outdoor recreation opportunities across multiple types of experiences:**

- A. Managing recreational use with the stewardship needs of the resource
- B. Varying intensity from self-guided to guided experiences
- C. Partnership opportunities for program delivery
- D. Varying costs to the user from “free to fee” based on value of the benefit to the participant and impact to the resource.

**Action Plan:** Big Hill Pond offers various experiences to park guests from ranger led hikes and floats, educational field trips (ranger led hikes, Birds of Prey, Pelts and Skulls, Creek Crawls, and self-guided hikes with signage around the park. Most of the interpretative signage around the park needs updating and needs to be addressed soon. The park is striving to make all guests feel welcomed and informed about

the importance of preserving and conserving the natural environment around them through both personal and nonpersonal interpretation.

### HELPFUL DEFINITIONS:

- Nonpersonal Interpretation: Interpretive media that do not require a person to deliver a message (i.e. exhibits, waysides, brochures, signs, magazines, books, etc.).
- Personal Interpretation: One person or persons providing interpretation to another person or persons.
- Interpretive Program: Activities, presentations, publications, audio-visual media, signs, and exhibits that convey key heritage resource messages to audiences. (Adapted from US Fish & Wildlife Service)
- Interpretation: a purposeful approach to communication that facilitates meaningful, relevant, and inclusive experiences that deepen understanding, broaden perspectives, and inspire engagement with the world around us.

## Financial Performance Goals

Financial performance goals are a critical performance management tool of the Tennessee State Park System. While the financial performance of parks are managed more intently at the system level, individual parks are expected to recover a portion of their operating costs through the generation of earned revenues where appropriate and to contribute to the system goals. The majority of earned revenues at state parks are generated through facility usage (campsites, cabins, lodge rooms, rentable pavilions, etc.), the delivery of fee-based programs and services, equipment rental and usage, and retail sales. Other forms of revenue generation come from golf courses and restaurants where those amenities are present. That said, not all parks have the same ability to generate earned revenues because the availability of facilities or programs vary widely from one park to the next. The “recovery” of operational costs by earned revenues is referred to as “cost recovery”. Operating costs beyond those supported by earned revenues represents the extent to which state funding support operations at each park.

The table below represents the overall park cost recovery for this specific park for the most recent fiscal year and forecast estimates for the upcoming five years. These estimates are based on projection estimates for known and foreseeable costs and recovery figures.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE GOALS						
	Current Cost Recovery (2022)	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2023	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2024	Target Cost Recovery: FY: 2025	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2026	Target Cost Recovery: FY 2027
Park Overall	13.3%	10.09%	8%	4%	9%	19%

DRAFT



DRAFT